

Never Let You Go by alabasterclouds

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Summary:

For everyone who asked me for more Eleven & Joyce h/c, this one's for you. Joyce reflects on her new little daughter and how she can be a good mother to her.

Wanna chat, prompt me, or just be friends? I'm on Tumblr: alabasterclouds.tumblr.com. I'm primarily an ageplay fic writer, but I don't write ageplay for underage characters :) H/C is a specialty of mine!

Never Let You Go

She had a daughter, once. A long time ago, before Jonathan.

She only opened her eyes for a minute. Too small, the doctors had said. She's not going to live, Joyce. And Joyce had known she wouldn't. She was born at twenty-eight weeks and well, they still haven't really figured out how to keep some older premature babies alive. But she'd breathed. And she'd looked at Joyce with slate-grey eyes that Joyce knew would turn a chocolatey brown.

Jonathan had come along a year later, and the tiny grave outside the Hawkins Baptist church had become a dim memory, something Joyce reflected on during holidays and long summer afternoons, and then only thought of once in awhile, when she had some downtime from the store and the hectic lifestyle of raising two active boys. Then she'd gotten divorced, and well, that little grave in the churchyard was probably completely overgrown by now.

Joyce knew she wouldn't have any more children after Will. For one, she didn't want any more; for two, she kind of thought maybe she was too old. And the money sometimes didn't even stretch enough to feed the three of them. Jonathan did his best with odd jobs, but the boy was sixteen years old. He shouldn't have to take on the role of a father to Will. Joyce should be able to afford enough for all of them. So Joyce had put the dream of having another baby, maybe a little girl - no, not to replace the little girl she lost, but just someone she could relate to on a deeper level . . . she'd put it away.

When Joyce met Eleven, she was mostly struck by her eyes. Chocolatey brown . . . and hunted. No child's eyes should ever look like that. No child should have ever been able to see what Eleven had seen, and could see.

Eleven was like some kind of wild animal; a deer, or maybe a rabbit. She never relaxed. She held herself stiffly, softening only slightly by the touch of Mike's hand. And she'd looked at Joyce with such mistrust. None of them knew the entirety of her time before she came to live with the Byers . . . Joyce had heard bits and pieces of the story, sobbed out at night after one of Eleven's many nightmares, but

she'd never really been held, that's for sure. She'd probably never really been touched, except to inflict pain. Joyce knew all the sweet-talk in the world would not win this child over.

And yet, Eleven eventually reached out to Joyce. She made the first move, and Joyce ran to meet her.

Shivering in the makeshift pool, Eleven had grabbed at Joyce and held her arm fast, as if she'd been drowning. And she'd screamed, but then made no sound, shaking violently against Joyce's chest. Her face was a mask of fear and pain, but she'd looked up at Joyce, sobbing.

"Help," she'd cried. "Help me."

Joyce had pressed her lips against the rough-shaven head, the fuzz surprisingly soft. The little girl smelled metallic and musty, but also fresh, like Will used to smell after being outside all day in his fort.

"Oh, honey, it's okay. It's okay. I've got you. It's okay."

The words seemed trite; lame, even, but Eleven had tipped her face up to Joyce and clung tightly. And though she said nothing, Joyce interpreted Eleven's moves exactly as the little girl had meant them: don't let go.

Nightly, now, Eleven cries out. She wakes up in a wet bed most nights; Joyce had not wanted to humiliate her with diapers and plastic sheets, but after awhile, she'd dug out Will's old rubber sheet from the back of the closet just to mitigate some of the nightly mess. She thinks both boys probably know about Eleven's little problem; but if they do, they haven't said anything. Eleven hasn't complained; not that she would, thinks Joyce. The girl doesn't ever complain. She barely speaks.

Nightly, Joyce hesitates at the door of Eleven's bedroom, the tiny office her ex-husband inhabited with his bottles of whiskey and porn magazines before Joyce wised up and kicked him out. Now, it's decorated, a perfect little girl's bedroom, complete with a ballerina music box, a baby gift that Joyce had been given for her first pregnancy and that she'd never thrown away. Eleven winds it up before she goes to sleep; Joyce rewinds it when she comes in to rock

Eleven back to sleep.

The tinkling music, the overture from *Swan Lake*, sparkles through the still air as Eleven sits up in bed, waiting for Joyce. Sometimes, she doesn't say anything - she just snuffles, and hiccups, and sobs, her arms held out insistently to Joyce. Sometimes, she whispers single words. "Upside Down." "Scary." "Help."

And rarely, "Mama. *Mama*."

It's hard to comfort Eleven. She can't abide sudden movements. She cries when Joyce has to help her change her wet nightgown and sheets. But once the initial upset is over, Eleven seems to almost melt into Joyce's arms. Joyce rocks her, murmurs to her.

"Oh, sweetheart. You're safe now. It's all right. I've got you. Poor baby. Shh."

They're simple words, but Eleven clings, sitting against Joyce, her arms wrapped around Joyce's shoulders and her tumbled head a comforting weight, cuddled into the hollow between Joyce's neck and shoulder. Eleven smells like bubble bath and shampoo, now, not so metallic and musty. She gives her muscles over to comfort much more easily than she used to. And it's hard to believe, sometimes, that Eleven is twelve years old . . . because she's so much, in so many ways, like a newborn learning how to attach to her mother.

Eventually the crying stops. Eventually the little head on her shoulder gets heavy. And the rhythmic thumb-sucking that Joyce had worried about and Jonathan had simply shrugged off - if the girl wants to suck her thumb when they're watching TV or she's feeling relaxed, let her - slows down. Eleven's shallow breathing deepens. She falls asleep, head on Joyce's shoulder.

Sometimes Joyce gently lays her down and leaves. Will wakes up, too, and he's often harder to comfort, now. Sometimes, Joyce just sits and thinks about this new little daughter, this tiny alien in their household; which, before all of this happened, Joyce would have said was pretty normal.

More often, Joyce will lie down in the bed beside Eleven and draw

her relaxed little body into her arms, spooning her. And she'll drop a kiss on her head, something Will doesn't let her do anymore, and Jonathan stopped letting her do when he was about eight.

She had a daughter, once. And now, though she doesn't always know what it means . . .

She supposes she has one again.